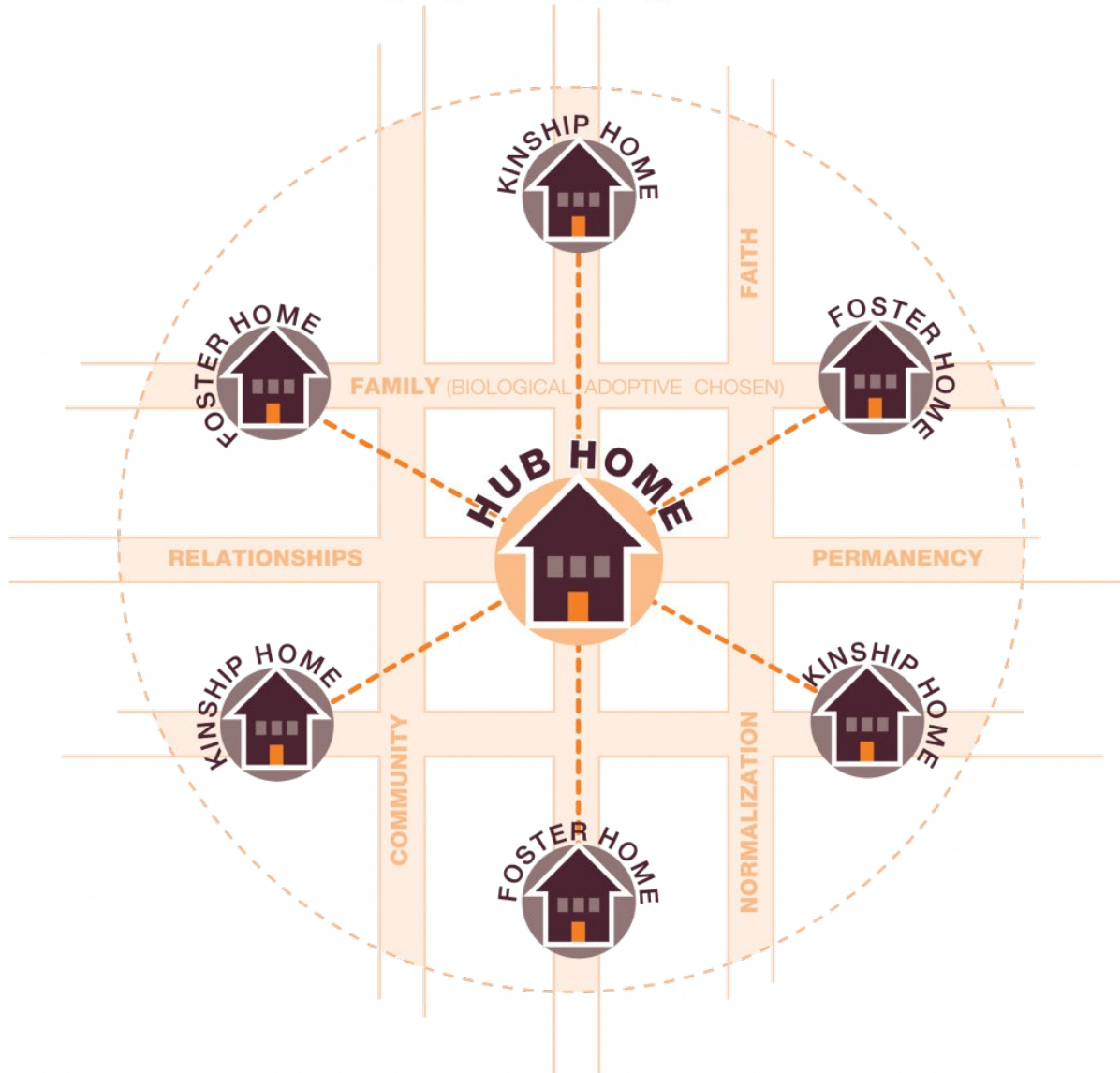




The Mockingbird Society

Improving foster care | Ending youth homelessness



The TeenWise Constellation Program:
Creating an extended family social and educational support
network to help adolescent foster youth and families thrive

Program Proposal for Family Engagement in a Youth Development Organization

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YDP 8050: Youth Development in the Context of the Family

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Overview

In traditional foster care programs, individual families are isolated, with very few opportunities for foster parents or foster youth to connect with each other. This isolation often contributes to negative experiences within the child welfare system. Of the 9,000 children and youth in out of home placement in Washington State 31% are between the ages of 10 and 17 (Partners for Our Children, 2015). The TeenWise Constellation Program (TWCP) aims to create greater supports and connections for adolescents foster youth (age 12+) and their foster families. This program would modify the Mockingbird Family Model for foster care in four significant ways—*The Four Points* ✦—which will be discussed in detail below. Briefly, it would create an “extended-family” network of foster families with adolescents. The proposed program also creates structured programming which will enhance foster parent training specific for working with older youth; build greater connections between foster parents and between foster youth in the Constellation; and promote positive relationships between foster youth, foster parents and siblings. Another component of the program is a the TeenWise Connection App, which will encourage connections on-and-offline between formal meeting times. A mentoring component of the program will engage foster parents and local community volunteers in mentor training, as well as coach foster teens on the utility of mentors and how to comfortably and productively engage them. Rather than be matched up randomly, trained adults and teens will then be given the opportunity to connect informally in “Mentor Mixers” to meet many different potential mentors and mentees and allow common interests and natural connections to evolve organically. The program outcomes will include foster youth having better academic achievement, increased social skills, and increased physical and psychological health. In addition, the TeenWise

Constellation Program will result in higher foster parent retention and greater adolescent placement stability and permanency.

The Youth-Serving Environment

The Mockingbird Society (TMS) is a Washington state based non-profit organization whose mission is to improve the foster care system and end youth homelessness (The Mockingbird Society, 2015). In this effort, The Mockingbird Society's Family Program works to support the implementation of an innovative model of foster care called the Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) (The Mockingbird Society, 2015). TMS partners with foster care placing organizations called host agencies, to implement the model throughout the state, the nation, and the world. The Mockingbird Family Model creates an intentional community, or Constellation, of 6-10 foster families centered around a Hub Home (The Mockingbird Society, n.d). The Hub Home is an experienced foster family that provides guidance, planned and emergency respite care, and general support to the other homes in the constellation (The Mockingbird Society, n.d.). Each Constellation meets monthly for social activities and foster parent training. The MFM is designed to create a greater level of support for both foster parents and the youth in their care. Each Constellation is assigned a host agency social worker that assists with coordination and logistics. Currently, MFM constellations serve children and youth of all ages within a single constellation. However, adolescents in foster care, and foster families caring for teens, have unique needs that could be better met through an exclusively teen-focused Constellation.

Research Rationale for Need

There is an important need to support youth in foster care and the foster parents that strive to provide a positive home environment for them. There are over 9,000 children and youth in out of home placement in Washington State (Partners for Our Children, 2015). Alumni of

foster care are much more likely to have low academic achievement, live at or below the poverty line, and experience mental health problems (Pecora, Williams, Kessler, Downs, O'Brien, Hiripi & Morello, 2005). In addition, nearly one in three youth who age out of foster care will experience homelessness within the first year of their exit from care (Shah, Liu, Mancuso, Marshall, Felver, Lucenko & Huber, 2015). Research on resiliency shows the positive impact of a caring relationship with an adult on youth outcomes such as higher education attainment (Haas & Graydon, 2009; Hines, Merdinger, and Wyatt, 2005). One source of caring adults for youth in foster care are their foster parents. An additional source of caring adults are mentors. The TeenWise Constellation Program would provide well-supported opportunities to grow and strengthen positive relationships between foster youth and these caring adults.

For a positive relationship to grow between adult and young person, foster parents need to be adequately supported. Currently, traditional models of foster care provide minimal training and ongoing support for foster parents. Many foster parents report lack of communication with service providers and lack of training as the main reasons for not continuing to foster children (Ray and Abramo, 2016). In fact, only 40% of foster parents will remain active three years after their initial licensing (Ray and Abramo, 2016). Bronfenbrenner (1998) highlights the importance of individual and organizational actors in a youth's environment to be in sync and in communication with one another. If they are not, the environment is less conducive to the youth's positive development. The Mockingbird Family Model aims to address the issue of supporting foster parents by providing regular trainings, foster parent mentors, and targeted Constellation caseworkers. In 2016, 170 families were served in the Mockingbird Family Model in Washington state through 17 different constellations (The Mockingbird Society, n.d.). Within

the model there was an 85% retention rate of foster families in 2016 and 86 youth moved into permanency (The Mockingbird Society, n.d.).

Children and youth have different needs at different developmental stages. The brain and body continue to change rapidly during adolescence (Hauser-Cram, Nugent, Thies, & Travers, 2014). These stages are often defined by the increased development of self-identity and desire for an increased sense of autonomy (Hauser-Cram et al., 2014). With the different development needs of adolescents, it follows that foster parents serving this age group would need unique training and support. Bradley and Caldwell (1995) outlined a framework of investments that parents can make in their children's lives including safety and sustenance, stimulation, socioemotional support, surveillance, and structure. The levels of investments that parents make will be different depending on the child's age and family circumstances (Bradley and Corwyn, 2004). In the case of foster children, the investments will also depend on the child's background, history, and level of supervision and services required by Children's Administration. Having a group of foster parents with youth who are in a similar stage of development will help with the provision of logistical and emotional support and determining appropriate levels of and mechanisms for parental investments.

The environment for foster families with adolescents is unique. Many of the foster youth will have been recently placed within the home and therefore the foster parents will have no base level relationship with the youth. Individuals often learn and repeat communication patterns from their parents and families (Galvin, Bylund, & Grill, 2010). When youth are placed in a new home, communication norms and styles may seem foreign and hard to manage. It often takes extra efforts by both the youth and parent to overcome these challenges. Having opportunities to support foster youth and parents in creating their communication and social norms will be

beneficial for positive relationship building that will lead to stronger, lasting placements, more satisfying experiences for youth and families and more positive youth development.

Planned Program Goals

Short-term goals

- *Build a supportive “extended-family” network* for adolescent foster youth and their foster families through creating a dedicated adolescent foster family Constellation community
- *Increase engagement* among the Constellation network of adolescent foster youth and families through multiple platforms including monthly educational and positive relationship-building workshops, service activities, social gatherings, and a dedicated social media app
- *Expand foster family knowledge and skills* of how to best support youth development for adolescent foster youth

Mid-term goals

- *Increase foster youth academic success, educational attainment trajectories, social skills, and psychological well-being* through training foster parents and community volunteers on how to be mentors and training foster youth on how to find and develop informal mentor relationships
- *Assist and retain* quality foster care givers through the added support of the Constellation community and the Hub family, useful and targeted educational workshops, and improved relationships with foster youth

Long-term goal

- Increase the likelihood of long-term stability and positive relationships between adolescent foster youth and foster families

Youth and Families Served

In the pilot year of the TeenWise Constellation Program the goal would be to create one adolescent focused Constellation that would engage 6-10 foster families in Pierce County, Washington. This would likely engage between 8-15 adolescent foster youth between the ages of 12 and 17. It is likely that the constellation would be representative of the foster families and adolescent foster youth in Pierce County. Data from January 2017 showed that there were 413 youth between the ages of 10 and 17 placed in an out of home care placement in Pierce County (Partners for Our Children, 2015). Of the total youth in care in Pierce County, over half (55%) were identified as White/Caucasian, 26% were multiracial, 13% were Black/African American, 2.8% were American Indian/Alaskan Native, 1.7% were Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander and 1% were Asian (Partners for Our Children, 2015). Seventy-four percent of foster parents in Washington State are White/Caucasian with the remaining 26% of foster parents being people of color (Marcenko, Brennan, & Lyons, 2009). Studies on the motivations behind adults becoming foster parents have shown a theme of altruism and the desire to help the community (Marcenko et al., 2009). Importantly, most foster parents will work outside the home, especially in single parent homes (Marcenko et al., 2009). Also, it is common that foster families will be made up of not only youth in foster care, but also biological and adopted children known as foster siblings. Finally, in creating the TeenWise Constellation a mix of new and veteran foster families will be included.

Recruitment Methods

The TeenWise Constellation Program seeks to engage both experienced foster families as well as new foster families to participate in the adolescent-youth focused program. The eligibility considerations are that the families are already licensed or will soon be licensed to host

adolescent foster youth, and that they live in the same regional area, so the Constellation members can support one another. Given that this program builds off, improves, and adds an adolescent focus to the existing Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) involving Constellations, there has already been some experience with recruiting participants to form a Constellation and the interest among foster families has been significant. Typically, one of the biggest deterrents to people becoming or remaining foster parents is the feeling of struggling alone and having to emotionally and logistically manage everything out on their own (Ray and Abramo, 2016). The concept of an “extended family” of support, of having others to lean on who understand and are facing many of the same challenges that one’s own foster family is, appears to be a recruitment tool in and of itself. Mockingbird has not had a problem filling spots available in its current Constellations. Given that the TWCP Constellations are specifically focused on adolescent foster youth and their foster families, and the monthly time commitment is a little more to allow for the added family relationship-building and educational activities, it may be moderately more challenging to recruit all 6-10 families to participate in the Constellation. Thus, staff will utilize several different recruitment methods to engage families.

First, social workers are important resources with eyes and ears on the ground in communities, each with relationships with many youth and families in that regional area. TWCP staff will supply social workers with recruitment flyers and information about the program so that as they meet new and existing foster families currently or planning to host adolescent foster youth, they can explain the benefits of the program and encourage them to sign on. Secondly, at foster parent recruitment fairs, TWCP will have staff and current foster parents on hand to share their experiences with a constellation program like this and encourage others to sign on. Third, TWCP will invite some experienced foster families of adolescents to learn about and apply to be

the “Hub” family. Moreover, these experienced foster parents will also be asked if they are willing to be on hand to converse via phone or in person with potential new foster parent recruits who may have questions and would appreciate a first-hand account of their experience in a similar program.

Additionally, volunteers from the regional community of the Constellation will also be recruited through flyers, handouts, word-of-mouth, and other ways to attend Mentor Mixers. This recruitment strategy is both useful to get mentor-inclined adults to consider taking on a foster youth mentee, as well as to create a lighter-touch, shorter time commitment volunteer role for potential foster parents. Mentoring for foster youth may give adults considering becoming a foster parent a better idea of the youth they would be supporting, and the challenges and rewards of becoming a foster parent. As such, this program aspect could serve as a recruitment pipeline gateway to encourage potential foster parents to get licensed.

Program Activities, Location and Staffing

The TeenWise Constellation Program builds onto, focuses, and expands the Mockingbird Family Model by offering four new key program elements, *The Four Points* ✧ as outlined below:

✧ 1. Adolescent-focused Constellation

The constellation of 6-10 foster families will specifically be focused on the adolescent age-group. It will include an experienced mentor “Hub Family” to create an extended family network of support, friendship, and logistical stability.

Staffing. A TWCP Program Manager in partnership with a Social Worker and a TWCP Program AmeriCorps Volunteer. The Program Manager will be responsible for curriculum design, programming, and engagement of experts and service partners for the monthly Constellation Connect Meetings. In addition, the Program Manager will oversee the TeenWise

Constellation Connect app design oversight and managing the tech support service contract. Finally, the Program Manager will manage tracking and reporting data from the assessments, initializing changes dependent on feedback and results, and overall program coordination and communication. The Social Worker will be responsible for recruiting and managing the caseload of foster youth within the Constellation and their relationships with families, as well as maintain foster youth and family engagement. The Social Worker will also oversee identifying the service agency partners to serve as convening locations for the monthly Constellation Connect Meetings. The Program Manager and Social Worker will lead the youth to youth and parent to parent break-out section cohorts of the monthly meetings. The AmeriCorps Volunteer will lead the foster siblings' cohort break-out at monthly meetings and support the ongoing efforts of the Program Manager.

Location. Participating Constellation families will be located within the community of Pierce County, Washington.

✧ 2. TeenWise Constellation Connect App

The TeenWise Constellation Connect App offers an online platform for adolescent foster youth and families to connect and support one another on and offline.

Staffing. The TWCP Program Manager will oversee content and design of the app, and will employ a technology service firm to build out and keep up ongoing tech support for the app.

Location. Online phone app and computer website

Details. Participants can log-in to the parent-portal, foster teen-portal, sibling-portal or a general family constellation area that feeds into all-three. On the app they can request and offer *advice* for other parents, siblings, and foster youth in the discussion boards, browse or post to a calendar of upcoming *meet-up events* for foster youth and families to connect while engaging in

community service, trips to local amusement parks, museums, college visits, conferences, potlucks, holiday parties, or other recreational or educational activities, and have easy, one-stop access to a wealth of *information and organizational resources* to support adolescent foster youth and families. The individual cohort portals allow for each group to engage directly with their own support group, while also having access to the larger group. The foster youth and sibling portals offer empowerment opportunities for youth to take leadership in seeking out or creating their own fun and informative events and activities to do with their peers, yet it is in a safe, monitored space so parents can keep a pulse on what their youth are interested and engaging in. In these ways, the app helps to support parental investments of stimulation and surveillance in their children and foster youth (Bradley & Corwyn, 2004).

✧ 3. Mentor Mixer Events

A series of mentor mixer events hosted 3-4 times each year to create a safe and comfortable space for natural mentorship relationships to develop between foster parents and community volunteers trained in mentoring and foster youth trained in how to seek out and utilize the support of mentors.

Staffing. The TWCP Program Manager will oversee mentor recruitment and training, with support from the AmeriCorps Volunteer and Social Worker.

Location. Part of the monthly Constellation Connect Meetings 3-4 times/year.

Details. These mixers will take the form of “speed networking” where youth and mentors will be given conversation prompts and facilitated interaction time to encourage them to chat with many different mentors/mentees over the course of an hour to see if any natural fits of mentor/mentee relationships develop and are worth pursuing. The Mentor Mixers will be held following educational trainings on the benefits of mentorship to youth. Having a positive

relationship with an informal adult mentor, for example, has been shown to contribute to greater social skills development and psychological wellbeing in youth (Hurd, Varner & Rowley, 2013) as well as increased academic success and higher educational attainment (Erickson, McDonald & Elder, 2009). By helping foster youth and parents recognize the benefits to having mentors, as well as coaching them on how best to seek out and be comfortable connecting with a mentor (for youth), and how best to engage and support youth as a mentor, apart from a parent or other role (for parents), the TWCP will support the development of these positive outcomes in youth. Community volunteers are also recruited to be mentors and invited to participate in these events to bring in additional supportive adult mentors for youth.

❖ 4. Monthly Constellation Connect Meetings

Monthly Constellation Connect meetings that emphasize *positive relationship-building* among foster youth, parents, and siblings in addition to *adolescent-focused educational programming* that coaches youth on how to better recognize and express their ideas and needs, while coaching families to better understand how to support the unique needs of adolescent foster youth.

Staffing. The TWCP Program Manager, Social Worker and AmeriCorps Volunteer will all organize and facilitate monthly meetings and will each lead one of the cohorts during the break-out time. The Program Manager and Social Worker will lead the youth to youth and parent to parent break-out section cohorts of the monthly meetings. The AmeriCorps Volunteer will lead the foster siblings' cohort break-out at monthly meetings and support the ongoing efforts of the Program Manager.

Location. Monthly meetings will take place at partner agency sites including community centers, church fellowship halls, schools, libraries, service sites, and other organizations that the Social Worker will arrange.

Details. Monthly Constellation Connect meetings are required for foster family and youth participation in TWCP and will regularly occur one Saturday per month from 9:00am - 12:30pm. If assessments are to be administered, participants will complete them directly following the meeting for about 15 minutes between 12:30-1:00pm. If a foster family has biological children in addition to foster youth, they are encouraged to attend so the full family system can engage with one another and learn together. Cox and Paley (1997) discuss how all entities in a family are significant when understanding and improving upon how the family system works because relationships between and among individuals do not happen just in dyads. Thus, the TeenWise Constellation Program focuses on supporting foster families and adolescent youth through engaging the whole family unit. The standing agenda for monthly Constellation Connect Meetings will be as follows:

9:00 - 9:40 AM - FAMILY, FRIENDS & FOOD - Informal relationship-building for foster youth and families to catch up with one another socially. All families bring a potluck brunch dish to share and are invited to catch up with old friends and meet new ones.

9:40 - 9:45 AM - Transition

9:45 - 10:55 AM - COHORT BREAKOUT SECTIONS where foster parents, adolescent foster youth and foster family siblings divide up with their own cohorts for targeted programming.

- ***Partners in Parenting*** (parent to parent support) - Continuing education workshops focused on adolescent foster care issues such as trauma informed care, resources available in schools, how to communicate with teachers about foster youth, how to discuss sexual education with foster youth, updates on laws/policies affecting the foster community, employment opportunities and challenges for foster youth, raising biological

and foster kids together in their family system, and how to encourage foster youth to develop more life skills such as cooking, budgeting, and professional communication.

- ***Teen Time*** (youth to youth engagement) - Hands-on continuing education workshops focused on meaningful issues to foster teens in a safe teen-centered space. Each month the programming will be complementary to what the foster parents and siblings are receiving but with a foster teen lens.
- ***Sibs Circle*** (foster sibling support) - Hands-on continuing education workshops focused on issues relevant to biological children in foster families and how they can best engage with their foster sibling(s) and parents in their family system. Each month the programming will be complementary to what their parents and foster youth are receiving, but with a specific foster-sibling perspective. Depending on how many siblings attend Constellation Connect Meetings and their ages, this may take many different forms to best support this cohort.

10:55 - 11:00 AM - Transition

11:00 - 12:15 PM - CONSTELLATION CONNECTIONS - Following the cohort break-outs, this part of the meeting brings everyone in the Constellation back together for hands-on activities that build teamwork, communication, trust, shared ownership, forgiveness, and problem-solving skills within a family unit and across the larger Constellation. Foster families and their adolescent youth work together on challenge courses, trust falls, “telephone”-type communication games, service activities such as writing letters to veterans or members of congress, role-playing, talent-sharing, community forum discussions, and other activities within the larger group meant to develop and practice skills while breaking

down walls and building stronger relationships, alliances, and support within their family system.

12:15 - 12:30 PM - CLOSING & COMMITMENTS - Facilitators share any announcements, upcoming events/activities going on and encourage engagement with the helpful TeenWise Connect App. Before departing, participants are asked to reflect on their experience that day, some may choose to share thoughts with the larger group, and all will write down in their TWCP journal one or two commitments they personally will make going forward.

Program Assessment

Evaluating the impact of the TeenWise Constellation Program on adolescent foster youth and families is very important to ensure progress is being made toward each of the stated goals in the short, medium, and long-term areas. Both *program effectiveness* and *participant enjoyment* of the program elements will be evaluated through pre- and ongoing assessments administered in survey form to foster youth and parents throughout (see assessment timeline below). Assessment surveys will connect back to the short, medium and long-term goals of the program through asking questions that will get at if/how and to what degree adolescent foster youth and families:

- Feel comfortable in their foster relationships
- Have developed trust in their foster relationships
- Communicate with one another and with other youth and families in their Constellation
- Engage in activities with one another and with other youth and families in their Constellation
- Feel knowledgeable about how to build and maintain stronger relationships with their foster youth/family

- Feel supported by Mockingbird’s TeenWise Constellation program staff
- Feel supported by their social workers
- Feel supported by the Foster Care system
- Feel supported by their Constellation of foster families
- Feel about the resources available to foster teens
- Feel about the resources available to foster parents
- Have had any behavior issues in their foster family or other relationships/activities at school and in the community.
- Feel confident in managing problems that arise in their foster families
- Utilize the TeenWise Constellation App to share information, ask for advice, post events, create meet-ups, and generally get support
- Are a mentor (parents) or have found a mentor (teens) through the Mentor Mixer events.
- Are comfortable and knowledgeable becoming a mentor (parents) or seeking out a mentor (teens) through the mentor education workshops

Additionally, foster youth school records (grades, attendance, disciplinary notes, and a brief teacher or guidance counselor survey) will be recorded at T1 and then at the end of the fall (December) and spring semesters (June) to understand youth progress towards goals of increasing academic success, social skills, educational attainment and psychological well-being. Finally, TWCP will gather feedback from additional stakeholders including program staff, volunteer mentors, and service partners following a one-time event and/or on a quarterly basis regarding how well program elements were run, their opinions on the overall effectiveness in achieving the set goals for the participants.

Assessment Survey Timeline and Considerations

Since foster youth can get placed in families at any time, there is not one universal start date or end-date to administer assessments, so they will be set on a cyclical time frame that youth and families will follow as long as they are in the program. Additionally, it is important for foster youth and families to have a certain amount of time to get to know each other and establish their baseline relationship before a pre-assessment is administered. Finally, having more frequent early assessments will allow program staff to understand whether the adolescent foster youth and their families are actively engaging in the program and having some early learning/gains through doing so. Moreover, if there are any red flags, staff will recognize them early on and step in to get clarity and offer additional support as needed. Thus, the following assessment schedule will be followed, with assessments projected to take about 10-15 minutes to complete. Both the adolescent foster youth and parents will complete assessment surveys each time.

- *Pre-assessment* will be administered at 1 week after the initial foster care placement
- *T1 Assessment* will take place at the end of the first monthly Constellation meeting. The foster youth and family must be placed together for at least 2 weeks prior to attending their first Constellation meeting.
- *T2 Assessment* will take place at the end of the 2nd monthly Constellation meeting
- *T3, T4, T5 etc. Assessments* will take place on a quarterly basis each year (March, June, Sept, Dec) with all youth and families participating in the program taking the assessments at the same time. Assessment time will be built into the monthly Constellation Meeting. Logistically, this will enable more streamlined assessment administration, data collection, input, and analysis of assessment data and ensure individual youth and families are not missed.

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Appendix A: Sample Flyer



MFM's TeenWise Constellation Program

An extended family social and educational support network to help adolescent foster youth and families thrive

The Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) is an alternative method for delivering foster care with the potential to improve safety, stability, and permanency for children and adolescents in the child welfare system. The MFM is grounded in the assumption that families with ready access to resources and support are best equipped to provide a stable, loving and culturally supportive environment for children and adolescents in their care.

The MFM unites 6-10 families living near a central, licensed foster home. This Hub Home provides resources and support to the families in the Constellation, including:

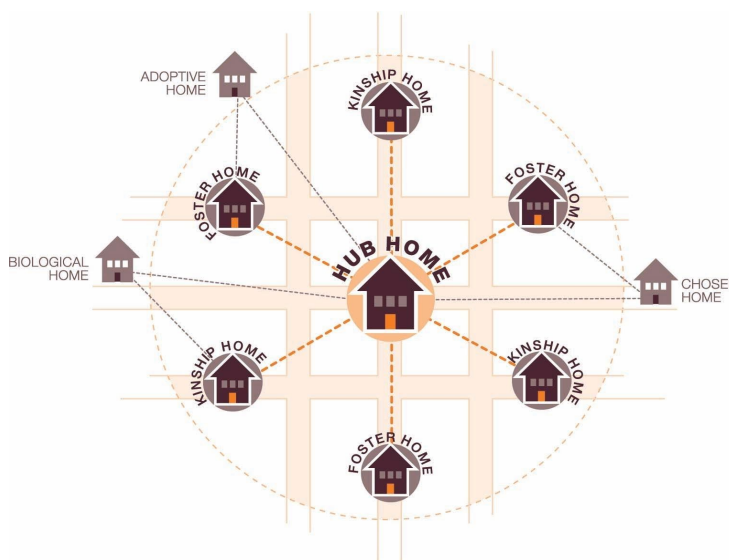
- Planned and emergency respite 24/7;
- Monthly meetings for families including peer interaction and support for caregivers;
- Unlimited access to social support and mentoring for caregivers;
- System navigation and access to community resources;
- Neutral environment for shared decision-making meetings & social worker visits; and
- Critical support to state case workers, increasing safety, well-being, and permanency.

Our Philosophy

The MFM TeenWise Constellation Program is dedicated to meeting adolescent foster youths' and their caregivers' needs in a way that is age appropriate, culturally relevant, and future oriented. The structure of the Constellation, Monthly Meetings, Online App and Mentor events is designed to address many systemic gaps found to be particularly damaging to adolescents in care. It provides a framework to support a community-based model of care through the provision of a network of supervision, support, and skill-building opportunities to foster parents and adolescents. Foster parent retention improves as this system of care helps take good care of the people who take care of adolescents.

The Mockingbird Family Model works. We have expanded upon it to create a teen-focused model with Four Points ✨ specifically targeted to support foster families caring for teens. Join us in forming the pilot TeenWise Constellation Program in Pierce County, Washington.

Get information.
Get support.
Get a **stronger relationship** with your foster teens.
Get an **“extended family” network** that gets it.
Get involved today!



MFM’s TeenWise Constellation Program offers families access to these resources and builds onto the family model in four key ways, specifically targeted to engage and support adolescent foster youth and the families that care for them.

<p>✦ 1. Adolescent-focused Constellation</p>	<p>Unites 6-10 foster families living in Pierce County, Washington to create an “extended family” support network, friendship & logistical stability, specifically focused around raising teens.</p>
<p>✦ 2. Monthly Constellation Connect Meetings</p>	<p>All Constellation families come together for shared meals, social time, positive relationship-building activities, and teen-focused educational programming delivered in cohorts. The Partners in Parenting cohort brings foster parents together to learn, discuss, encourage one another, and problem-solve the everyday challenges you face as foster parents of teens. The Teen Time cohort brings your foster teens together to discuss complementary issues in ways that capture their interests and attention and communicate key information. They’ll practice talking to you in the same ways you’ll learn how best to communicate with and support them. The Sibs Circle is where your biological children can connect with other youth who also have adolescent foster siblings at home, giving them a supportive space for camaraderie, inspiration, and connections to other siblings who understand the many shapes, sizes, excitements, and challenges of foster families. Following cohort time, the whole Constellation comes back together for activities in family units that build teamwork, communication, trust, shared ownership, forgiveness, and problem-solving skills. Attempt a challenge course, write letters to congress, role-play a teacher conference, make cards for veterans, develop a family community contract, and more in a supportive and fun family environment.</p>
<p>✦ 3. TeenWise Constellation Connect App</p>	<p>Offers an online platform for foster teens, parents, and siblings to connect on and off-line. Access information and resources pertinent to adolescent foster youth. Request or offer advice to other parents and teens in the discussion boards. Browse or post on a calendar of meet-ups and enjoy amusement park days, movie nights, service projects, pick-up games, college visits, local talks or other fun and educational activities with your foster teen and extended Constellation family. Empower your foster teen to organize an event and feel comfortable you know where how they are spending their time.</p>
<p>✦ 4. Mentor Mixer Workshops & Events</p>	<p>Create a safe and comfortable space for natural mentorship relationships to develop between foster parents and community volunteers trained in mentoring and foster teens coached on how to seek out and utilize mentor support. Mentors matter in teens’ lives. Positive relationships with an informal adult mentor have been shown to contribute to greater social skills development and psychological wellbeing in youth¹ as well as increased academic success and higher educational attainment.² Unfortunately, foster youth do not often have access to the extended networks that provide access to informal mentors, or the skills and comfort in reaching out to make those connections. TeenWise’s Mentor Mixer program helps foster teens understand the importance of mentors and build the skills to develop strong relationships with them. Parenting is not the same as mentoring and we also train foster parents in how to be mentors to youth in the constellation, while training additional community volunteers interested in mentoring foster youth. Training and opportunities to connect yields strong, meaningful mentor relationships.</p>

¹ Hurd, N.M., Varner, F.A., & Rowley, S.J. (2013). Involved-vigilant parenting and socio-emotional well-being among black youth: The moderating influence of natural mentoring relationships. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 42, 1583-1595.

² Erickson, L.D., McDonald, S., & Elder, G.H. (2009). Informal mentors and education: Complementary or compensatory resources? *Sociology of Education*, 82(4), 344-367.

TeenWise Constellation Roles

<p>Hub Home Family:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Experienced Caregiver● Strong Communicator, Excellent Interpersonal Skills● Understands Developmental Stages of Adolescents● Excellent at Building Community● Can Successfully Navigate Child Welfare System● Trained to identify & Effectively Manage High Risk Situations● Flexible Lifestyle● Stable Home Life● Possesses Healthy Social & Emotional Skills● Organized & Creative● Home is Central to Satellite Families	<p>Satellite Family:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Willing Engager in the Constellation as a Micro-Community.● Benefits from a Supportive Network of Foster Parents Caring for Children & Youth.● Can Commit to attending Monthly Meetings and being a Supportive member of the Constellation.● In Reasonable Proximity to the Hub Home.
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Need More Information?

Want to Get Involved in becoming a part of our first TeenWise Constellation?

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